

WITH goal average likely to play a decisive part in this year's Rothmans Isthmian League championship, Wycombe Wanderers must beat Bishop's Stortford tonight (Tuesday) if they are to stay in the race. But what's more important, they must not concede a goal.

For every goal conceded, a team must score three to balance their average. At the moment only .006 separates Wycombe from Enfield and the latter could improve on theirs with their match against Dagenham on Thursday. That is Enfield's last match and they must then sit back and wait on the outcome of Dagenham's visit to Loakes Park on Saturday.

Any thoughts that Dagenham's form would suffer after their 3-2 defeat against Tilbury in the Essex Senior Cup final on Saturday were soon dispelled last night, when they thrashed Hitchin 7-0 at home. Despite their massive victory, their goal average is still inferior to Enfield and Wycombe.

If Enfield beat Dagenham on Thursday, they will finish with 95 points — as will Wanderers if they beat Stortford and Dagenham. Those two Dagenham defeats would bring an end to the Essex club's challenge. If any of these last few matches are drawn, the situation could change dramatically.

All these facts will weigh heavily on the players as they begin the final 10 days of the season. It is now as much a test of character as anything else and how an individual can live with those pressures.

Wanderers have lived with pressure in the past, however. Big match nerves and tension have been overcome before and I think they will do it again.

On paper their match tonight against Stortford looks good for three points. Eleventh in Division One, Stortford have had a contrasting season with many of their established players leaving at the start of the term. Manager Ted Hardy also quit in mid-season, Ian Wolstenholme taking over. The former Slough and Enfield goalkeeper has come a long way with his squad.

Last month, Stortford held Wycombe to a 1-1 draw at Rhodes Avenue and their work rate on that day was particularly impressive. Skipper Dave Lawrence had a fine game and did much to help his youngsters — players like Kevin Mulkern, who once spent half a season with local club Amersham.

Both goals at Stortford came from the penalty spot, Martin Smith scoring for the home side and Tony Horseman for the Blues. The draw brought Wycombe's run of 10 victories to a close and had they taken half the chances they created, they would have won comfortably.

One man who helped prevent that was Terry Moore, one of the best goalkeepers on the league circuit. He injured his back recently and will miss tonight's game. His replacement is an England schoolboy international Lee Smelt. He played for England under 18's against Scotland recently and this will be his third game for Stortford. Apart from the one change, Stortford, who beat Walton and Hersham 1-0 at home on Saturday, should field the same side.

Wanderers will be hoping to have Terry Reardon back in midfield. Terry has a leg injury and his inspiration was badly missed at Tooting where Paul Birdseye moved into the middle. Steve Perrin also has a badly bruised leg.

Manager Brian Lee will try to impress on his players the need to stay calm in these last two matches. If the Blues can relax, there's no reason why they should not take this championship.

ROTHMANS ISTMIAN LEAGUE

Division 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enfield	41	28	8	5	74	25	92
Wycombe Wanderers	40	26	11	3	89	30	89
Dagenham	39	28	5	6	90	35	89